

SB-6616 – Testimony

I wish to commend wholeheartedly the sponsors and architects of Senate Bill HB 6616. I think it is a Bill that is integral for providing a social safety net for some members of the migrant population. However I do believe that even though this step is commendable, it is conservative and needs to go further to address the plight of migrant populations in Connecticut.

Today this very Bill reestablishes the distinction between documented and undocumented. Why are we unable to simply remove labels and provide access to healthcare that is not a privilege but simply a right.

It is clear to me that this Bill is well intentioned but in its current state it makes the documented migrant agricultural worker just as invisible today as he was 80 years ago.

I write to ask for considerations for the **H-2A migrant agricultural group** who are just as vulnerable as the undocumented children we seek to protect.

What will you give to a group of workers who contribute far more than US\$2 Billion dollars in income for the state? What will you give to this group that bears a considerable amount of the tax burden, this group of agricultural workers who pay federal and state taxes and are forced to contribute to the PFMLA, with no reciprocal benefits whatsoever?

Constantly, these men and women are exposed to bias in the hospital system where the assumption is they do not deserve the access to healthcare that they so desperately seek. Year after year, my office fights for these ladies and gentlemen who are turned away because they do not understand the system and very often navigators refuse to walk them through it. I can attest to horror stories that undermine the goodness that resides here in Connecticut, and I simply ask that as law makers you challenge yourselves to stop existing on the periphery but engage and implement a healthcare system that does not exclude but rather one that is an expression of love for those who need it most.

The success that will come is a significant reduction in the debt that remains when primary care is too expensive and simple issues become major issues burdening a system that is already coming apart at the seams.

Debbie Hutchinson, is a Vice Consul for the Government of Jamaica, with special responsibilities for migrant H-2A workers in the state of Connecticut. Jamaican agricultural workers have been supporting the state's economy since the 1940's and they have helped build the communities in many towns across the state. They spend on average, almost 300 days out of every year in the state, which means they spend more time in Connecticut than in their home country.